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NEWS

Sen. Pat Jehlen says it was ‘just time’ to retire after 50 years of public service

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

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Sen. Pat Jehlen speaks to a group at the Massachusetts State House. After 50 years in public office, Jehlen decided to not seek re-election and will effectively retire on Dec. 31. COURTESY PHOTO/SEN. PAT JEHLEN

Sen. Pat Jehlen has never been afraid to take a step into the unkn
fact, it’s been her trademark in her 50 years of public service.

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“There was a vacant seat,” a laughing Jehlen says, when asked what made her run for public office. “That was 1975 and I was running for the Somerville School Committee.”

Sen. Pat Jehlen in 2025 supported a bill to provide greater access to menstrual products. COURTESY PHOTO/SEN. PAT JEHLEN

It’s a long time ago, Jehlen says, and a long journey to her current position representing the people of the 2nd Middlesex District in the Mass. Senate, which includes portions of Cambridge and Winchester and all of Somerville and Medford.

But it’s a position Jehlen will only hold onto until the end of December. In November 2025, she decided not to run for re-election.

“I’d been thinking about it for a while,” the 82-year-old says. “Then I made the decision. I felt much lighter, more focused. I’ve been in gove long time. It just seemed like the right time.”

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One thing Sen. Pat Jehlen has done in her 50 years of public service is speak to residents far and wide. And, she says, she enjoys meeting people and talking to them about what concerns them most. COURTESY PHOTO/SEN. PAT JEHLEN

Jehlen set about making a list of the things she wanted to accom

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before the year was over.

“I’ve taken on a few projects, but I’m not in the race or campaigning,” Jehlen explains. “I am just focusing on getting stuff done.”

What stuff?

“There are so many things that haven’t gotten done in the district, so many issues that people care about,” she says.

Jehlen lists home care licensure, adult assisted living, a bill to move forward on social insurance for long-term care, working with the Attorney General’s Office to support people with wrongful convictions and finding funding for education and early childhood literacy.

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Sen. Pat Jehlen has been an advocate of expanding services to the elderly of the Bay State and has been repeatedly honored for her efforts. COURTESY PHOTO/SEN. PAT JEHLEN

That’s a long list. But something Jehlen feels she can finish or make a large dent in before retirement.

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"I'm still in office until Dec. 31," she says. "Most of the things I want to make happen will take place through July. That's the end of the formal session."

And Jehlen said she will probably be taking on whatever ballot questions end up on the November ballot. But that's it.

There are already three challengers vying for the job: Medford/Somerville Rep. Christine Barber, Winchester School Committee member Tom Hopcroft and Somerville City Councilor Matt McLaughlin.

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A long career

So, how did Jehlen land in office to begin with? She says she was a history and civics teacher in Brookline, but was living in Somerville with her family.

That's when a seat on the School Committee became vacant. And she thought, "Why not?"

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It’s great to see projects through fruition and even though she might not get through her to do list this year, Sen. Pat Jehlen says she will still be involved in all the issues that interest and concern her. COURTESY PHOTO/SEN. PAT JEHLEN

Jehlen won and sat on the body for 16 years.

“We made a lot of progress in the schools,” she says, of her time in office. “I helped win the lawsuit that challenged funding of the public schools and Somerville really profited.”

Jehlen was also instrumental in starting school choice in Somerville and integrating the high school and trade school into one campus.

In 1991, Joe Mackey ran for district attorney and left an open seat as state representative. Jehlen decided to run — and won. She was in the position until 2005 when Sen. Charles Shannon died of leukemia, leaving his seat open.

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Being an elected official is a 24/7 job and here, Sen. Pat Jehlen battles the cold to make a speech at an event. COURTESY PHOTO/SEN. PAT JEHLEN

Jehlen ran against Mackey and Rep. Paul Casey, of Winchester. She said running for the seat was an easy decision.

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“There’s more influence in the Senate,” she says. “There were things I wanted to get done.”

Like now?

“You know, I haven’t thought about what next for me,” she says, shrugging. “I tend to think about what’s left to do. I am totally focused on my bucket list.”

OK, that’s not totally true, she admits a short time later.

“There’s no plan,” she stresses. “I think I’ll see my friends more often and I’ll take better care of my garden. My husband retired quite a while ago and he’s running a blog about Boston Public Schools.”

Never one to stand still, Sen. Pat Jehlen is often at events and demonstrations, doing whatever s
support not only the people in her district, but throughout the state. COURTESY PHOTO/SEN. P

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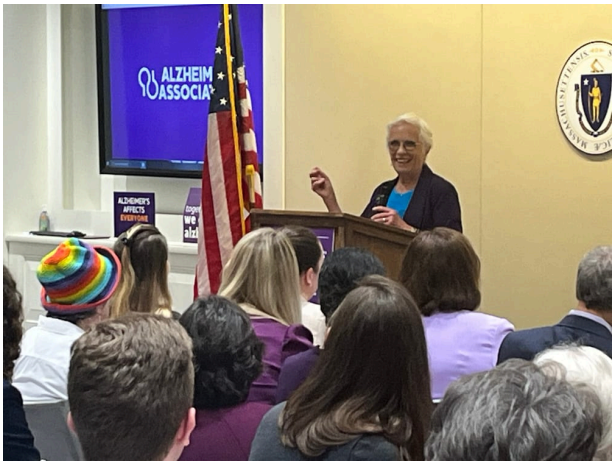
Will she still be involved in politics?

“I think in some way,” Jehlen says. “I was involved before I was even in office. There might be an issue here and there. I don’t really know. I just know I’ll be involved.”

In fact, Jehlen wishes the general public was more involved.

“I think we need a lot better civics education,” Jehlen says. “I don’t think we’ve done enough in the requirements. People need to learn to have civil discourse and learn how their government works and how to make it work for them.”



Whether speaking on the Senate floor, left, to a group of concerned residents, center, or at a State House event, right, Sen. Pat Jehlen has used her position to improve the lives of residents not only in the 2nd Middlesex District, but across the Commonwealth. COURTESY PHOTOS/SEN. PAT JEHLEN

There’s a sigh as Jehlen thinks about where we are as a nation.

“I think everyone needs to model better behavior,” she says. “On the local level, we have a lot to do.”

Nell Escobar Coakley has been a journalist for more than 30 years. She i
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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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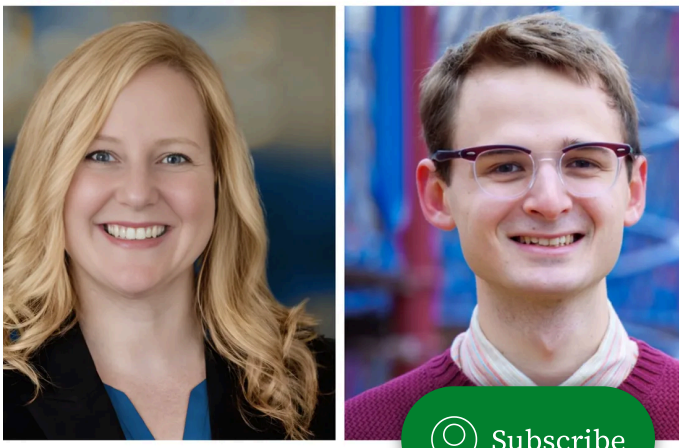

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The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women’s History Month and International Women’s Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. This iconic production is set in the 1920s. Performances will take place on March 13 and 14

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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